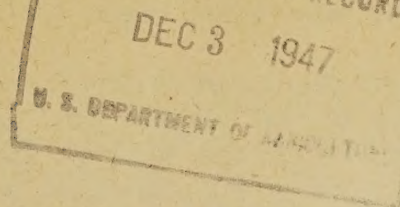


1.933  
C 782  
Cap 3  
Co-op Chat: An informed membership - your co-op's greatest asset.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
RURAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.



November 25, 1947

To All REA Co-op Officials:

An informed and loyal membership is your co-op's greatest potential asset. It is a valuable aid to efficient management and it is the key to getting and keeping wholehearted community support for the co-op. Unless the co-op members themselves understand and take an active interest in their co-op business, other groups in the rural community cannot be expected to give it their approval and support.

The building of good consumer relations is generally recognized as an important objective of sound business management. It is even more important in an REA co-op whose consumers are also its legal owners. What they, as members and patrons of the co-op, know and think and do about it and how well they learn to make use of the services it offers will, in the long run, be a deciding factor in spelling the success or failure of the co-op business.

The job of helping the members understand their co-op and how it works cannot safely be postponed until the co-op's line construction program is completed. Nor should there be delay in assisting them to make the best use of electricity. Member education is a continuing process, and reasonable expenditures for it are a proper part of the co-op's cost of doing business. By making good use of its personnel and of the volunteer services of interested members and other rural leaders and educators, every REA co-op can develop a program suited to its needs and moderate in cost.

A small co-op may be able to do a good deal of power use and cooperative education without employing a full-time educational worker, through an active Education Committee working closely with the board, the manager, and rural leaders and educators in the co-op area. But many REA co-ops have now reached the stage where the employment of one or more full-time educational workers has become highly desirable.

The dollars and cents value of a member education program may not always be apparent in the beginning. But experience has proved that, if carried out effectively, it will pay high dividends in terms of good member relations, more effective power use, better cooperation



## 2-Co-op Chat-

with management policies and procedures, lower operation and maintenance cost, greater security for the co-op as a user-owned and controlled business, and wider community support.

I know that many REA co-op directors and managers share my concern about the need of co-op member education and that many co-ops have carried on educational activities of one kind or another. Such local efforts are more and more being ably supplemented and stimulated by the publications of statewide associations of electric co-ops and by the constructive thinking and action of statewide education committees. But the subject is so important that I should like every director and manager to think about it and to do what he can to get an effective program developed in his own co-op. We in REA will be glad to help with suggestions and in other ways as much as possible. But the responsibility for the decision, the planning and the execution rests with you co-op leaders locally. It is not enough for a board to "pass a resolution" authorizing an educational program, and then to expect the manager to assume sole responsibility for getting it carried out. I feel very strongly that this is one phase of the co-op management task in which board members themselves can and should take an active and continuing part.

I hope you will take time to study the attached "Suggestions for REA Co-ops interested in developing a Member Education Program." These suggestions are based largely on what co-ops here and there have already been doing. They include a statement of desirable objectives, an outline of desirable activities, suggestions on how to go about doing the job, and a statement of desirable qualifications for REA co-op educational workers.

While not all of these suggestions may fit your co-op's specific needs, I believe they give a good indication of the magnitude of the job waiting to be done. It is obviously too big a job to expect to get done in a short time. It is, in fact, a long-time, continuous job. But the sooner it is started, and the more of the various activities are developed together, the better all-around results you can look forward to. Let us never forget that an informed, loyal membership is the real foundation of any co-op's success.

Sincerely,

*Claude R. Wickard*

Administrator



## Suggestions for REA Co-ops Interested in Developing a Member Education Program

The co-op board has the responsibility for initiating and developing an effective program of member education in cooperative principles and practices and in power use. Building good community relations is also a necessary part of such a program. While the manager may be given general responsibility for the direction of the education program, it seems highly desirable that either the board itself or an alert education committee set up by the board maintain an active interest in that program and work closely with the person or persons employed to conduct such educational activities. Many managers are so busily occupied with other equally important matters of co-op management that they might not be able to give as much personal attention to this activity as it deserves.

Obviously, every co-op official and every co-op employee should be actively concerned in the building of good membership and community relations. But the broad member education program outlined below can be developed effectively only by employing one or more qualified persons (depending on the size of the co-op and on other considerations) who will give full attention to the task. Regardless of whether such an educational employee is given the title of electrification adviser, educational adviser, member relations adviser, agricultural engineer, home economist, or some other title, his or her work should be concerned with the broad field of activities outlined below. Since few persons can be expected to bring to such a job all of the needed knowledge and experience, it should be considered an essential part of such an employee's responsibility to acquire as rapidly as possible the additional knowledge and training needed for doing a good, all-around job.

### Objectives

The co-op's educational program should have the following major objectives:

1. An informed membership actively interested in making the co-op enterprise a success.
2. Efficient use of electricity by members in the home and on the farm.
3. Effective application of electricity to improvement of rural community facilities.
4. Good community relations and strong community support for the co-op.



## Outline of Activities

Such a program involves many activities which obviously cannot all be started and developed at the same time. Local needs and the limitations of available personnel for the job will have to be considered in deciding what activities to start first and how much attention to give to each respectively.

For reference purposes, the activities listed below are broken down under three general headings. But in actual practice it will be found very desirable to combine elements of different activities so as to make the most of any particular occasion. For example, at any neighborhood meeting of members or prospective members called for the purpose of presenting information about wiring, lighting, plumbing systems, or specific power applications, information should also be given about the co-op, who owns it, how it works, and how it benefits rural people.

### I. Developing and Maintaining Effective Member Participation.

1. Aiding members to understand the immediate and long range benefits to be gained through membership in the co-op.
2. Aiding members to understand cooperative principles and methods, their own co-op and its problems, and their rights and responsibilities as set forth in the bylaws.
3. Enlisting active member interest and participation in co-op affairs to assure the broad basis of member support and member control which is essential to the co-op's safety and permanence as a consumer-owned and controlled service enterprise.

### II. Helping Members to Use Electricity Effectively.

#### A. Working with Members

1. Aiding members to understand the importance of good, safe and adequate wiring and lighting for home and farm, to plan for adequate wiring and lighting, and to obtain a good job at reasonable cost.
2. Aiding members to understand the benefits obtainable on the farm from a pressure water system, to plan for a modern plumbing installation adequate for family and farm needs, and to obtain a satisfactory installation at reasonable cost.



3. Aiding members to know what electric appliances and equipment will be most beneficial or profitable for them to use in their homes and in their farming operations, and helping them obtain the desired appliances and equipment.
4. Aiding members to understand the problems involved in the operation and care of their electrical equipment, also problems relating to repair and servicing of their equipment, so as to get the greatest possible benefits from the use of electricity.

B. Working with Other Groups

1. Getting acquainted with the programs and personnel of other local agencies and organizations concerned with the welfare or educational needs of rural people, and enlisting their cooperation, wherever practicable, for the benefit of the co-op member families. This means, especially, working with
  - a. State and County Agricultural Extension Service, U. S. D. A. Councils, and vocational agriculture and home making teachers;
  - b. State and local health officials;
  - c. County and local school officials and educators;
  - d. Youth groups such as FFA and 4-H Clubs;
  - e. Farm organizations, other co-ops, community clubs and PTA's.
2. Encouraging and assisting dealers and contractors (including any purchasing cooperative handling electrical equipment) in activities leading to desirable distribution, installation and servicing of electric and plumbing equipment.

It is essential, however, that co-op employees work at all times in the interest of the members of the co-op which employs them. Their



job is not to promote indiscriminate load building by helping the dealers sell equipment, but to help the co-op members select and obtain the kinds of equipment which will be most useful or profitable for the members to operate. The co-op is the agent of its members, not of any dealers, and needs to conduct its power use program so that the members will be justified in looking to the co-op for sound information and advice.

3. Working with civic groups and community leaders in the co-op area in promoting and developing the effective application of electricity to various community facilities, such as schools, churches, health and community centers, services enterprises, and new rural industries. This also involves aid in the planning and carrying out of such activities as school lunch programs.

### III. Building Good Community Relations.

Helping the community, its civic and business groups and leaders, understand the nature of the co-op and its place as an important community enterprise, so as to bring about and maintain good community relations and wholehearted community support. While all co-op officials, employees and members should be concerned with building good community relations for the co-op, the major responsibility for this rests on the co-op managers and the co-op educational workers.



### How to go about Doing the Job

Most co-ops may find it a good plan to set up an Education Committee which will work closely with the educational worker in developing a rounded co-op education program. Membership on such a committee need not be confined to directors of the co-op, although it seems generally desirable to have a director as chairman, provided that he or she is genuinely interested in seeing an effective program developed.

When an educational worker has been employed, the board and the manager should make sure that he or she will, as quickly as feasible, become adequately informed on such matters as

- a. The co-op, its history, present status, problems and future plans;
- b. The REA program, its history, extent, and how it works;
- c. Cooperative history, principles and practices, types and extent of co-ops in America;
- d. The types of farming, farming practices, living conditions, and community facilities in the area served by the co-op;
- e. Correct and up-to-date facts on technical subject matter such as wiring, lighting, plumbing, home and farm electrical equipment.
- f. Civic, educational and other agencies and organizations, including other co-ops, in the area which are concerned with the welfare of rural people;
- g. The electrical dealer, wiring and plumbing contractor situation in the area;
- h. Public information channels in the area, such as newspapers and radio stations.

As soon as practicable, the educational worker should, under the guidance of the manager and with the help of the Education Committee, draw up an outline of a flexible, year-round schedule of educational activities to meet the needs and interests of the co-op membership. This schedule, when approved by the co-op board as a whole, should be followed as far as conditions will permit. Among the methods for making an educational program effective, the educational worker should find the ones listed below particularly useful:



1. Establish friendly contacts with
  - a. Extension workers and other farm leaders;
  - b. School officials and other rural educators;
  - c. Newspaper editors and radio station managers;
  - d. Officials and leaders of other co-ops in the area;
  - e. Public officials, civic and church leaders;
2. Plan and hold community and neighborhood meetings for members and prospective members, at which information about the co-op and about REA is combined with power use information, as well as with some sociability.
3. Arrange power use demonstrations and make sure of effective follow-up.
4. Issue a monthly newsletter to members as a means of getting and keeping them informed.
5. Prepare or obtain, and distribute to members leaflets and bulletins providing correct and up-to-date information on various uses of electricity and on co-op matters.
6. Assist the board and manager with plans for the annual members' meeting, particularly in planning the educational and entertainment features, in preparing the informational material to be distributed, and in publicity and attendance promotion efforts.
7. Meet with dealers and contractors to inform them of co-op program and obtain their cooperation.
8. Prepare and place articles about the co-op in local papers and house organs of organizations.
9. Collaborate with radio station manager on programs dealing with rural electrification and with the co-op.
10. Tell the co-op story before civic groups, business men's clubs, women's clubs, farm organizations, church groups, etc.
11. Arrange for displays and exhibits about the co-op and about rural electrification at fairs, in public and business places.
12. Give talks in schools and aid teachers in preparing study material on electricity and on co-ops, and meet with youth groups, such as FFA and 4-H Clubs.
13. Take active part in civic affairs and in the development of any community improvements intended to make life more satisfying for the rural people in the area.



### Desirable Qualifications for REA Co-op Educational Workers

The job of planning and conducting an effective member education program in cooperation and in power use calls for a rare combination of training, knowledge, experience, attitudes and abilities. Probably no man or woman can be found who, in the beginning, is ideally qualified for the job. Therefore it seems most important to select the person with the greatest capacity for growing into and with the job.

In appraising the respective qualifications of applicants for the position of educational worker on the co-op staff (by whatever title the position might be designated), co-op boards and managers would do well to be guided by the following considerations.

#### Essential Qualifications.

Obviously, a person is needed who has good health and vitality, initiative and resourcefulness, a desire to learn and to help others to learn, and at least the equivalent of a high school education. In addition, and quite apart from any special professional training and experience, all of the following qualifications are considered essential if an effective job is to be done:

1. Sympathy with the rural electrification program.
2. A basic understanding of what a co-op is and how it works.
3. Belief in the cooperative way of doing business as a means of improving the living standards of people.
4. An understanding of farm life and of how electricity can contribute to better farming and to better farm living.
5. Ability to gain and maintain the professional respect and cooperation of educators (school teachers and principals, technical instructors, Extension Service workers) and of other professional workers (such as health officials) serving rural people.
6. Ability to work with rural people and to enlist their cooperation.
7. Willingness and ability to get authentic and up-to-date information needed in the member education job.
8. Ability to speak effectively before a group of people.
9. Ability to write simply, clearly and in correct English.
10. Ability to organize and conduct group meetings.



11. Ability to plan and conduct an effective demonstration.
12. Ability to recognize, develop, and make use of neighborhood and community leadership.

#### Special Qualifications.

Along with the qualifications listed above, it is highly desirable that the person selected should have at least some of the training and experience listed below:

1. Experience of working with farm people in a professional capacity.
2. Practical experience in co-op organization work.
3. College training, preferably in home economics, or some phase of agriculture, or social science.
4. Actual experience of living on a farm.
5. Practical experience in organization work with farm organizations, men's or women's clubs, church or civic groups.

#### How to Determine an Applicant's Qualifications.

A sound appraisal of an applicant's qualifications by the board and the manager should be based on:

1. The applicant's Personal History Record, which should set forth his or her sex, age, marital status, educational background, employment record (for each job listed: employer's name and address, nature of job, when and how long held, beginning and final salary, reason for leaving), and any other training, experience or activities the applicant may wish to list, also 3 character references.
2. A supplementary written statement by the applicant, giving the reasons for applying for the job, and explaining why he or she feels qualified to undertake it.
3. A personal interview with board and manager (if applicant was not ruled out on basis of written application). The purpose of this interview should be to find out how well the applicant measures up to each of the qualifications listed above. This can be done best through informal questions and conversation.
4. A check-up (if interview was satisfactory) with recent employers and at least 2 character references.